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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: PRESIDENT YUSHCHENKO'S OUR UKRAINE
CHANGES ITS PUBLIC TUNE ON COALITION NEGOTIATIONS

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Classified By: Ambassador, reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶11. (SBU) Summary. For several weeks in the wake of the March 26 elections in which it was soundly defeated by Yuliya Tymoshenko's Bloc (BYuT), Our Ukraine (OU) bloc leaders offered primarily positive public commentary, with reservations, about the formation of an Orange Rada majority coalition and its potential coalition partners, BYuT and the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU). OU Negotiators Roman Bezsmertny and Roman Zvarych, the lead advocates for such a "coalition of democratic forces," provided the public voice for Our Ukraine. However, in the wake of the April 14 rejection of a key component of the coalition protocol negotiated April 13 by Bezsmertny and Zvarych, OU has switched its messengers and the tone of its message. PM Yekhanurov, empowered by Yushchenko to talk to all five parties that made it past the three-percent threshold into the Rada, including Regions and the Communists, assumed a higher public profile and emphasized the supposed high correlation between the platforms of Party of Regions and OU, in pointed comparison supposedly to those of BYuT and the SPU. OU insider Petro Poroshenko repeatedly trashed Tymoshenko as a liar and a blackmailer in an April 18 evening TV appearance, a tone maintained in an April 19 Our Ukraine press release, which sought to lay the blame for lack of coalition talk progress completely on BYuT and the SPU. Several OU MPs openly said that not all OU MPs would vote for Tymoshenko as PM, even if the coalition leaders and President Yushchenko eventually endorsed her candidacy. Even though many OU-BYuT-SPU coalitions had already formed in oblast and city councils across Ukraine, on April 19 People's Union Our Ukraine (PUOU) forbade local party branches from forging coalitions outside the Our Ukraine camp in oblasts and municipalities without specific authorization from the national party. Meanwhile, no coalition negotiation sessions took place April 14-19, and as of late April 20, none were scheduled. Instead, the parties resorted to increasingly shrill accusations and insults delivered via the media, even while claiming commitment to eventual formation of the three-way coalition.

¶12. (C) Comment: It was perhaps inevitable that, in the wake of the April 14 rejection, Our Ukraine would reduce the role and prominence of the two "Romans" who had negotiated the April 13 protocol on the formation of a coalition with BYuT and the SPU, and take a go-slower approach to coalition formation. But it is also unlikely to be mere coincidence that two of Tymoshenko's fiercest critics within Our Ukraine, Poroshenko and Yekhanurov, suddenly became the public voices of the party, while the two strongest advocates for an Orange coalition, negotiators Bezsmertny and Zvarych, went completely silent. This is the second time such a switch has happened; after Bezsmertny and Zvarych expressed public willingness on election night to recognize Tymoshenko's claim on the Premiership based on her strong showing, Yushchenko

temporarily yanked Bezsmertny off the negotiating and public voice roles in favor of Yekhanurov, before handing the mandate back to Bezsmertny. Whether this second shift is simply a negotiating tactic designed to place more pressure on Tymoshenko and Moroz to meet Our Ukraine demands or proves to be a harbinger for a more fundamental shift in strategy on coalition formation remains to be seen. End Summary and Comment.

Different messengers, and a harsher message

¶3. (SBU) After the March 26 election in which BYuT delivered a stunning defeat of Our Ukraine (22 to 14 percent of the national Rada vote), the public voice and face of Our Ukraine was largely that of People's Union Our Ukraine (PUOU) Party and Our Ukraine (OU) Bloc chair Roman Bezsmertny, the most conciliatory advocate of an Orange coalition with BYuT and the SPU, and of accepting Tymoshenko as PM. The PUOU and OU Political Councils empowered Bezsmertny and Zvarych to conduct negotiations with BYuT and the SPU. However, there was always a significant minority of PUOU leaders against accommodating Tymoshenko, and by extension, open to consideration of a deal with Regions as an alternative. In the wake of the April 14 partial rejection by the People's Union Our Ukraine (PUOU) Executive Council of the April 13 protocol, PUOU and OU Chair Bezsmertny largely disappeared from public view. After several days of silence, the OU vacuum was filled by prominent critics of Tymoshenko, chiefly PM Yekhanurov and Poroshenko.

¶4. (SBU) Yekhanurov, who has occasionally quipped that Tymoshenko's economic policies could be described as national communism, used his mandate from Yushchenko to carry out

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discussions with all political forces that will enter the next Rada to highlight the commonality of economic policy interests between OU and Regions, which he said reached 75%, in comparison to a 40% with the Socialists; as for BYuT, "they have no economic platform at all." Yekhanurov's approach differed greatly from Bezsmertny's, who instead stressed the deep differences between OU and Regions on foreign policy and domestic political arrangements. On the April 7 edition of ICTV's "Svoboda Slova" (Freedom of Speech) talk show, Bezsmertny aggressively challenged the Regions' coalition program proposal calling for a review of already signed WTO protocols, no NATO membership, and effective federalization of Ukraine, all of which differed from Yushchenko's stated priorities.

¶5. (U) Poroshenko-owned Fifth Channel invited both Tymoshenko and Poroshenko to appear on its prime time interview show April 18. Tymoshenko declined a live co-appearance but delivered a taped broadside, saying she would never work with Poroshenko, Yekhanurov, and OU Rada faction leader Martynenko, a trio she accused of attempting to scuttle Orange coalition negotiations in favor of an OU deal with Regions. Poroshenko replied in the studio, repeatedly accusing Tymoshenko of lies, lies, and more lies (brekhnya), twice calling her a blackmailer, and placing the entire blame for the 2005 Orange team divorce on her. He also said OU was ready to contest a repeat election if it came to that.

¶6. (U) OU MP-elect Oleksandr Volkov, identified by Ukrainska Pravda as a supporter of an OU-Regions coalition as well as being linked to shadowy Mogilievich associate Dmytro Firtash, gave an April 18 interview in Ukrainska Moloda, owned by Yushchenko's childhood friend Myhailo Doroshenko, in which he recommended Tymoshenko drop her bid to become Premier because she had been a failure the first time in 2005 and would fail again in 2006. Our Ukraine MP Pozhyvanov warned that many OU rank-and-file MPs might not vote in favor of Tymoshenko as PM even if Yushchenko forwarded the nomination to the Rada, since there was no constitutional obligation to follow party discipline.

Playing the blame game, rather than negotiating

¶7. (SBU) In the absence of any contact by Our Ukraine negotiators with BYuT and SPU from April 14-18, BYuT and SPU leaders met April 18, then held separate news conferences in which Tymoshenko and SPU deputy leader Iosyp Vinsky both voiced support for Tymoshenko to become PM and Moroz to serve as Rada Speaker. Both accused Our Ukraine of holding up the negotiating process and flirting with Regions. Tymoshenko went further, accusing Poroshenko and Martynenko of conspiring with prosecutors to have BYuT MPs-elect (and ex-SBU leaders) Turchynov and Kozhemyatin arrested in an effort to try to provoke BYuT to withdraw from coalition talks.

¶8. (U) The April 19 statement issued by Our Ukraine in reply continued Poroshenko's combative tone from the previous evening: "The Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc is continuing the list of lies that was started during Rada elections. We point out that they are doing everything possible and impossible to break up a coalition with Our Ukraine by reducing the negotiating process to granting the Premier's position to Tymoshenko and the position of Rada Speaker to the Socialist Party. We emphasize that all responsibility for disrupting the negotiations on setting up a coalition of democratic forces lies with our partners in the negotiations."

¶9. (SBU) Later April 19, however, the PUOU Executive Council undermined that claim by forbidding local party organizations from creating coalitions at the local level with any party outside the national Our Ukraine bloc without special permission from the PUOU Executive Council. In the wake of the March 26 elections, and in anticipation of a likely national coalition, provincial branches of OU, BYuT, and the SPU had announced formation of majority coalitions in a number of oblast and town councils once local results had been finalized and new councils had been seated (note: the Central Election Commission has authority over the national Rada election only). The only known exception was in the Kiev City Council, where BYuT announced the formation of a majority with PORA-PRP (Reforms and Order) and a local Kiev Civic Activist bloc. The PUOU order, if implemented, would freeze formation of oblast and municipal council majorities, disrupting local governance in the same way its national go-slow strategy delays formation of a majority in the Verkhovna Rada.

¶10. (SBU) The gamesmanship continued on April 20, with Poroshenko seeking to split the BYuT-SPU alliance by saying

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that Our Ukraine would not object to Moroz becoming Rada speaker as long as Our Ukraine retained the Premiership. BYuT, in his opinion, should get several ministerial and oblast governor posts.

¶11. (C) Comment: Given that BYuT received more votes than Our Ukraine and the SPU combined, Poroshenko's comment can only be taken as another calculated insult in Tymoshenko's direction, and an indication that despite OU's claims to be focused solely on policy issues, jostling over positions continues in parallel. Meanwhile, an entire week has passed without a single trilateral negotiating session having occurred since the April 13 signing of the protocol to form a coalition.

¶12. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at: www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.

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